

Fall Protection in Agriculture

Introduction

Falls are the leading cause of injuries and fatalities in the workplace. The agricultural setting has many tasks and situations that could potentially put an employee at risk of falling from heights. Fall protection must be provided for all workers exposed to a fall over 4 ft.

Find the Hazards

It's important to be aware and identify all the hazards involved in the tasks that you perform. Agricultural work tasks that may involve risks of a fall can include:

- Activities on machinery/equipment or structures that are being inspected, tested, maintained, repaired, filled, or cleaned
- Tasks on slippery or potentially unstable surfaces
- Using equipment to access an elevated work surface
- Working on a sloping surface which is difficult to maintain balance
- Tasks that are close to an unprotected edge

Common Locations and Equipment with Fall Hazards

- Silos and grain bins
- Accessing vats and tanks
- Windmills and towers
- Loading and unloading trucks and trailers
- Pits, effluent ponds, or lagoons
- Accessing trees
- Farm machinery (tractors, combines, planters, etc.)
- Accessing roofs and gutters for maintenance and cleaning

Controlling the Risk

Using the hierarchy of controls by going from most effective to least effective:

1. **Eliminate the Risk**—Highest level of control. This involves removing the hazard or hazardous work practice from the workplace through arranging the task to be performed from the ground or solid construction, whenever practicable.
2. **Install a Passive Fall Prevention Device**—This involves using a guard railing, elevated work platform (ex. Cherry picker), or a temporary work platform (such as a scissor lift).
3. **Install a Fall Injury Prevention System**—For example, a safety net, catch platform, or fall harness system.
4. **Use a fixed or portable ladder**—or implement administrative controls such as work procedures that are designed to eliminate or reduce the risk of a fall.

Training

If your work puts you at heights greater than 4 feet without some form of fall protection, let your supervisor know, consult the [written program](#), or contact University Health and Safety (UHS) at (612) 626-6002 for further guidance.

Summary

There are many factors that can cause or contribute to a fall incident in the workplace. Unsafe conditions coupled with unsafe actions of employees while working at heights can result in a serious injury or fatality. Do not put yourself or other workers in a position where an injury from a fall can occur.

Portable Ladders

Introduction

Portable ladders are commonly used in the workplace but require careful use. Many incidents can be avoided with common sense and good work practices. Some of the most common incidents that occur when we use portable ladders can be avoided by following these tips:

- Read and follow all labels and markings on the ladder.
- Avoid electrical hazards—Look for overhead power lines before handling a ladder. Avoid using a metal ladder near power lines or exposed energized electrical equipment.
- Always inspect the ladder prior to using it. If the ladder is damaged, it must be removed from service until it is repaired or discarded.
- Always maintain 3 points of contact on the ladder when climbing (two hands and a foot, or two feet and a hand). Keep your body near the middle of the step and always face the ladder while climbing.
- Only use ladders and appropriate accessories (ladder levelers, jacks or hooks) for their designed purposes.
- Ladders must be free of any slippery material on the rungs, steps, or feet.
- Do not use a self-supporting ladder (e.g. step ladder) as a single ladder or in a partially closed position.
- Do not use the top step/rung of a ladder as a step/rung unless it was designed for that purpose.
- Use a ladder only on a stable and level surface, unless it has been secured (top or bottom) to prevent displacement.
- Do not place a ladder on boxes, barrels, or other unstable bases to obtain additional height.
- Do not move or shift a ladder while a person or equipment is on the ladder.
- An extension or straight ladder used to access an elevated surface must extend at least 3 ft. above the point of support. Do not stand on the three top rungs of a straight, single, or extension ladder.
- The proper angle for setting up a ladder is to place its base a quarter of the working length of the ladder from the wall or other vertical surface.
- A ladder placed in any location where it can be displaced by other work activities must be secured to prevent displacement or a barricade must be erected to keep traffic away from the ladder.
- Be sure that all locks on an extension ladder are properly engaged.
- Do not exceed the maximum load rating of a ladder. Be aware of the ladder's load rating and of the weight it is supporting, including the weight of any tools or equipment.

Questions

If you have questions on these topics, please contact University Health and Safety (UHS) at (612) 626-6002.